



Aging Planning Bulletin for Aging Leadership Planning Teams

Creating Walkable Communities

Walking is our most crucial and oldest form of transportation. For many older adults, the ability to walk in their community is essential for remaining active, healthy, and engaged with others. Others use walking as an alternative to vehicles, but more would likely walk if their community had convenient, safe, and enjoyable places to walk. Until recently, walking received little attention in the design, planning, and development of communities. Important areas for improvement include land-use planning, zoning, and street and highway design, all of which are critical needs across North Carolina. The purpose of this APB is to provide aging leadership planning teams with resources about the importance and feasibility of creating a more walkable community so that they can engage community members, public officials, business leaders, and professional staff in the transportation planning process. There are many opportunities big and small to improve the conditions for walking that will help make all communities become more Livable and Senior-Friendly.

Best Practices:

Several NC communities are taking steps toward becoming more walkable. We have highlighted three different approaches underway across the State.

Walk Wise, Drive Smart – Hendersonville: Walk Wise, Drive Smart, is a program designed to enhance awareness of issues and improve conditions for safe and enjoyable walking. The program is the result of collaboration between the Council on Aging for Henderson County and several community and statewide organizations. It is funded by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Governor's Highway Safety Program. This comprehensive program provides opportunities to learn more about safe walking and driving; has safe walking and driving patrols; is creating safe walking routes in neighborhoods with support from the City of Hendersonville; and sponsors group walking programs.

Morganton: Staff from the Western Piedmont Area Agency on Aging (AAA), along with a group of volunteers, conducted a walkability survey of downtown Morganton. Sheila Weeks, AAA Director, recommends getting the support of the Mayor and Town Council before undertaking the project, which involves mapping out routes and training volunteers to conduct the survey. Individuals with physical disabilities were a vital part of the survey team as their ability to navigate the downtown area is especially important. Survey findings were reported to the Mayor and Town Council and positive feedback was received. Most importantly, some of the recommendations were included in the City of Morganton's ten-year plan.

Southeastern NC: Communities across Bladen, Cumberland, Harnett, and Sampson counties utilized the expertise and training of the National Center for Bicycling and Walking to lay the foundation for their walkability project. Foundation representatives conducted Walkable Community Workshops across the region. These workshops were opportunities for interested citizens to learn about successful pedestrian design, to talk with nationally recognized experts in walkability, to take a walkabout to explore and identify current obstacles across the community, and to identify short and long-range solutions to make their communities more pedestrian friendly.

Similar walkability activities have been conducted in Chapel Hill, Mocksville, and Walnut Cove.

Questions for Local Planning Teams:

- Are there communities in your area that would benefit from improved walkability?
- Has a walkability survey been completed in your area?
- Are there other groups, businesses, or organizations who could take the lead in improving walkability? How can you best partner with city and county officials – planners, engineers and public works – who have responsibility for pedestrian safety and walkability?
- How would the residents of your community define “walkable?” This should be taken into consideration.
- How would you ensure that the effort would be worthwhile – that recommendations would be considered, implemented, and sustained?
- Are there local foundations, or other regional or local partners, that could provide financial support?

Contact and Resource Information:

A variety of information about creating walkable communities is available online. For the “do it yourself” groups, there are surveys, guidelines for the design of pedestrian friendly areas, and tools for the planning and design of walkable communities. These tools will help you get started with the process. Before you get started, contact your City or County Planners to find out what activities may already be going on and to engage their support. Organizations such as the National Center for Bicycling and Walking provide resources, but are also available for individualized consulting. Walkable Communities, Inc. also has a variety of materials on its website as well as materials available for purchase.

Resources:

- National Center for Bicycling and Walking: www.bikewalk.org
- Walkable Communities: www.walkable.org
- Active Living Network: www.activeliving.org
- Sustainable Communities Network: www.sustainable.org
- Walk Wise, Drive Smart (Henderson County): www.walk-wise.org
- AARP Walkability Survey (included in Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide): http://www.aarp.org/research/housing-mobility/indliving/d18311_communities.html
- Walkable Communities Walkability Survey: www.walkable.org
- NC Department of Commerce, Division of Community Assistance (for information about possible grants through the Community Development Block Grant): <http://www.nccommerce.com/en/CommunityServices/>
- Pedestrian Bicycle Information Center: www.walkinginfo.org
- America Walks: www.americawalks.org
- AARP: http://www.aarp.org/bulletin/yourlife/street_smart.html

For more information about Livable and Senior-Friendly Communities contact Erin Russell King at 919-733-8400 or erin.king@ncmail.net